.1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929) 1937
OI 17 Murngin OI 17

PREFACE

This book is the result of three years (1926-1929) spent in Australia in two field trips to northeastern Arnhem Land in the country bounded on the eastern and northern limits by the Sea of Arafura and the western shores of the Gulf of Carpentaria. The field research was done under the auspices of the Rockefeller Foundation for the first year and the Australian National Research Council for the last two; without their generous financial assistance it could not have been attempted. I am indeed grateful. Part of the data has been published in certain of the scientific journals, to whom I offer my thanks for allowing me to republish that part of my material in its present form.

That this book is essentially a communal creation rather than the work of an individual is clearly demonstrated to the author when he finally has completed his task. If the essential elements of genius could be analyzed I believe that a large proportion of the fundamental factors involved would be shorn from the so-called creator and given to his contemporary society. If this is partly true of genius it is almost wholly true of the ordinary fellow who does research in the social sciences and publishes his results as I have done in the pages that follow. In a sense, when I express my deep gratitude and my many obligations to those whose names are to be found in the next few paragraphs either for practical assistance which made the field work easier or because of their molding of the fundamentals of my thinking in the field of social anthropology, I am only partially recognizing their communal labor in creating this study of the North Australian aborigines.

My deepest obligation is to the Murngin people themselves, who gave me a fine, whole-hearted hospitality. I am particularly indebted to one of them, Mahkarolla, one of the finest men I have had the good luck to count among my friends. I sometimes wonder at the futility of so-called progress when I think of him.

I wish to thank my friend and first teacher, Robert H. Lowie, one of the few great American social anthropologists, for first taking in hand my rather difficult human material and molding out of it, if not

2: Berndt E-5 (1946-1950) 1955
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and the internal or domestic aspects." In the latter context kinship carries maximum weight; among the Wulamba there is more or less equal balance between these two features. The corporate body as such, among the Wulamba, is based on kinship.

As Fortes has pointed out (1953:31), when lineage structure is discussed it is considered "from a particular analytical angle, with the organization of jural, economic, and ritual activities." It is on this aspect that we require more detailed consideration in relation to the descent group among the Wulamba. This is the case, too, with the structure of authority mentioned by Fortes (p. 32), for a lineage as a corporate group. Each Wulamba descent group has an acknowledged head, an elder to whom all within his group look up. He, in conjunction with elders of other parallel groups forming the linguistic group, has special ritual duties and power: his authority is reinforced by ritual sanctions. It would seem, then, that a more detailed analysis of the significance of the descent group in Arnhem Land religious life would be a rewarding avenue of investigation.

In these last few paragraphs my purpose has been only to consider the corporate unilineal descent group (as found among the Wulamba) in relation to what Fortes has termed the lineage. It (i.e., the unilineal descent group) is for him the basic determinant of lineage structure. If that is so, we can legitimately mention some of his broad generalizations in relation to our concept. Further, we have not deliberately tried to show that the descent group as present in northeastern Arnhem Land social structure is, or may be, equated with a lineage. But there are points of comparison between these two separate, but similar, concepts. These aspects of compatibility we have indicated, and they are propositions for further empirical testing.

NOTES

[1] I have preferred the term used by the people themselves: they are the Wulamba, which refers collectively to all their clans; that is, they may be said to be the Wulamba bloc. The varying dialects are collectively known as Miwoldj. Warner (1937) erroneously used the term "Murngin," which is the name of only one clan and should not be used in this sense.

[2] The material presented here was obtained at Millingimbi in 1950; short periods of work had previously been spent there, in 1946 and 1947. More intensive field work was carried out in 1946–47 within the vicinity of Yirrkalla, northeastern Arnhem Land. The initial period of research was carried out under the Australian National Research Council, the latter under the Research Committee of the University of Sydney: both were under the auspices of the Department of Anthropology, University of Sydney. The writer wishes to acknowledge the help and encouragement of Professor A. P. Elkin of that Department. This paper was written under a Nuffield Foundation Dominion Fellowship, in London. It was presented in part and discussed at a seminar on kinship theory at the London School of Economics.

[3] The kinship terms used in this paper are in their Anglicized equivalents: these differ in some cases from those used by Warner and Radcliffe-Brown. For instance, *marikmo* is *mariimo; yepp*, *jaba; maraitcha, muraldja; mareiker, muralgur; kutaru, gudaru; nali, gudi; gawel, galwal; arndi, gundi; golle, galri; dut, duwei; notjheaiker, gudiwalgur; kaminjer, gaminjar;* etc. Terms in capitals denote males.

[4] The approximate population of Arnhem Land is 4,000; 1,500 to 2,000 possibly belonging to the Wulamba bloc.

3: Mountford E-5 (1948) 1956 O117 Murngin O117

FOREWORD

It is with pleasure that I write the Foreword to this, the first of a series of volumes describing the scientific results of the 1948 Arnhem Land Expedition. Thus, the hopes for the eventual publication of the expedition's findings, expressed seven years ago by the Hon. Arthur A. Calwell in the Preface, are being realized.

The Arnhem Land Expedition, which the foresight of Mr Calwell, then Minister of State for Information, made possible, was a joint project of the National Geographic Society of America, the Commonwealth Government of Australia and the Smithsonian Institution of the United States of America. It was planned, organized and led by Mr Charles P. Mountford, then a member of the staff of the Department of Information and later an officer of my Department, with Mr Frank Setzler, of the United States, as deputy leader.

Until the expedition went into the field in early 1948, Arnhem Land was one of the least known parts of the Australian continent. It is no longer so. As this volume and those which will follow it will show, the expedition made important findings in the fields of aboriginal art and mythology, ethnology, archaeology, nutrition and health, botany and zoology.

In addition to advancing the frontiers of world knowledge in all these fields, the expedition consolidated and extended the co-operation and mutual respect already existing between academic circles in the United States of America and Australia.

W. S. Kent Hughes
Minister of State for the Interior

Canberra, A.C.T.
December 1955

3: Mountford E-5 (1948) 1956 OE17 Muregin OE17

INTRODUCTION

THE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY-Smithsonian Institution-Commonwealth of Australia Expedition to Arnhem Land was planned as a result of negotiations between representatives of the Australian Government and the National Geographic Society of Washington, U.S.A. 121 122

The attention of the Society's officials had been drawn to the possibilities of research in the remote parts of Australia by two coloured films on aboriginal life, 'Tjurunga' and 'Walkabout', which had been made by Mr Charles P. Mountford whilst he was leader of the 1940 and 1942 Adelaide University anthropological expeditions to Central Australia. These films attracted the attention of the Director-General of Information, who decided to send Mr Mountford on a lecture tour to the U.S.A., as part of the Australian overseas information programme.

During the tour, the largest and most enthusiastic audience was four thousand members of the National Geographic Society, in the Constitution Hall, Washington. The interest of the Research Committee of the National Geographic Society stimulated Mr Mountford to submit a proposal for a scientific research expedition to Arnhem Land. To this proposal the National Geographic Society agreed, appointed Mr Mountford as leader, and after negotiations between the Australian Minister at Washington, Sir Frederic Eggleston, and the Minister for Information, the Hon. A. A. Calwell, the Commonwealth Government offered to make Mr Mountford's services available and to provide transport for the expedition.

The original expedition party suggested by the National Geographic Society was to have been small, an American biologist from the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, and Mr Mountford, to study the various phases of aboriginal life.

This was, however, further considered by the Australian Government. Realizing that such an expedition afforded a great opportunity both to better the good relations between Australia and the United States of America, and to investigate one of the least known parts of Australia, the Minister for Information arranged for the party to be much more comprehensive, consisting of both American and Australian naturalists and ethnologists.

Arnhem Land[1] was chosen because, being an almost unknown country, there had been very little research into its natural history and ethnology; for it is a curious fact that although the Gulf of Carpentaria and Arnhem Land were the first parts of Australia to be discovered, they are still the least known parts of the Australian continent. 121

As early as 1606 Willem Janszoon, in the yacht *Duyfken*, had sailed down the east coast of the Gulf of Carpentaria, turning back at Cape Keerweer, without realizing he had discovered the largest unexplored land mass in the world. 121 175

1. Map, Fig. 1.

[p.viii is blank]

3: Mountford E-5 (1948) 1956 Oll7 Muragin Oll7

THE STORY OF THE EXPEDITION

In 1946, when planning began for the expedition to enter Arnhem Land early in 1947, full co-operation came from many quarters. The National Geographic Society and the Smithsonian Institution of Washington offered to make members of their staffs available; the Minister for Information undertook to meet all travel and transport costs; the Minister for Air offered air transport, wherever it was possible; the Minister for the Army allowed the expedition to draw on Army stores for food and equipment; the Minister for Health arranged for a unit of three scientists from the Institute of Anatomy to join the expedition, their object being to study aboriginal health and nutrition; the Minister for the Interior, who placed his Northern Territory organization at our disposal, later helped us greatly, assisting in the transport arrangements and the forwarding of mails and supplies; and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research released a navigator and engineer to man the 66-foot Army trawler which had been promised from the Disposals Commission. With so much co-operation and help, considerable progress was made toward completing the arrangements for the expedition by the end of 1946. The Australian authorities, however, considering that a postponement of a year would allow time for a better arrangement of staff and transport, suggested such a course to the National Geographic Society and the Smithsonian Institution of Washington. Both agreed to the postponement.

By the beginning of 1948 the final party had been selected and the arrangements for transport and supplies completed, except for the boat, the non-provision of which was the sole cause of the delays, misfortunes and disorganization that beset our movements. The first contingent of the American party, Dr David Johnson and Dr Robert Miller, from the Smithsonian Institution, and Mr Howell Walker, from the National Geographic Society, reached Sydney by air on 21 February. Two days later Mr Frank Setzler and Mr Herbert Deignan, both from the Smithsonian Institution, arrived in Brisbane by boat.

Their arrival completed the scientific party, which consisted of Frank Setzler, deputy leader and archaeologist; Robert Miller, ichthyologist; Herbert Deignan, ornithologist; Howell Walker, staff photographer and writer; Brian Billington, medical officer; Miss Margaret McArthur, nutritionist; Kelvin Hodges, biochemist; Raymond Specht, botanist, from the University of Adelaide; Frederick McCarthy, anthropologist, Australian Museum, Sydney; and myself as leader, ethnologist specializing on aboriginal art, and film director.

Other members of the party were: Mrs Bessie Mountford, honorary secretary; Peter Bassett-Smith, cine-photographer and wireless operator; Keith Gordon, transport officer; John Bray, cook and honorary entomologist. No previous scientific expedition in Australia had covered so many interlocking fields of natural history, medical science and ethnology.

3: Mountford E-5 (1948) 1956 OII7 Murngin OII7

THE STORY OF THE EXPEDITION

After being entertained at vice-regal, civic and academic receptions in the capital cities, in a manner seldom accorded a scientific party, members assembled in Adelaide during the second week in March. On the morning of 18 March, all left for Darwin, over two thousand miles away, in a Royal Australian Air Force plane and well before sunset we reached our destination. The delivery of heavy equipment, which had been sent overland, delayed the party for ten days in Darwin. The naturalists, however, were fully employed, for the sea coast and jungles adjacent to the camp were particularly rich in fauna and flora.

It was planned to establish four research camps and to stay in the field from March until November, leaving before the oncoming wet season would hamper, if not prevent, our movements. Each camp would be situated in different topographical conditions, conditions which not only determined the distribution of the fauna and flora, but also influenced the aboriginal way of life.[4]

The camps were to be:

(a) Groote Eylandt. This was an island camp, with a somewhat stony hinterland and a distinctive aboriginal culture.

(b) Roper River. A fresh-water river and swamp environment and an aboriginal way of life which depends largely on river and fishing techniques.

(c) Yirrkalla. Situated on the sea coast in north-eastern Arnhem Land, with fresh-water swamps and eucalyptus forests in the rear. The culture of the aborigines has been somewhat influenced by Macassan fishermen who, until about forty years ago, regularly visited those parts.

(d) Oenpelli. On the western escarpment of the Arnhem Land plateau. This camp has a particularly wide range of topographical conditions, each with its own distinctive fauna and flora. To the east is the rugged Arnhem Land plateau, in which there are many aboriginal cave shelters. At the base are lines of fresh-water lagoons, the home of a multitude of water-birds and fish and, to the west, the widespreading floodplains of the Alligator Rivers.

By 1 April the heavy camp equipment and supplies had reached Darwin and the party was ready to move to our first camp at Groote Eylandt. However, although the Royal Australian Air Force was able to fly us to Groote Eylandt in Catalina flying-boats, it did not have planes capable of transporting our forty-seven tons of food, camp gear and scientific equipment. Providentially (at least, so it seemed at the time) the owner-skipper of a 200-ton, flat-bottomed wooden barge called the *Phoenix*, which had been commissioned to bring dismantled material to Darwin from an old flying-boat base at Groote Eylandt, offered to carry the supplies on the outward journey, promising to reach there within fourteen days of our departure.

4. Map, Fig. 1.

THE STORY OF THE EXPEDITION

122 As the Catalina, by making two journeys, could take the party, a skeleton camp, and twenty-one days' supply of food to Groote Eylandt, I arranged for one group to leave on 3 April and the second to leave two days later. But heavy storms and monsoonal rains so reduced visibility that the flight on 3 April was impossible. Next morning we set out, reaching Little Lagoon, a small, almost land-locked harbour on the north of Groote Eylandt, about midday. We established camp at Umbakumba, a native settlement under the control of Fred Gray, and on 6 April were able to welcome the remainder of the party with the exception of David Johnson, Herbert Deighan and Howell Walker, who were travelling on the *Phoenix*, the two naturalists to collect over a wider area, and the latter to gain local colour and photographs for his *National Geographic* articles.

The early days of our camp at Groote Eylandt were marred by a series of misfortunes, all associated with communication and water transport. When Peter Bassett-Smith installed his short-wave set, he found that the valves had been damaged and the set would not function. This meant that we had no communication with the outside world, except through a distant mission station, and then only with the aid of native runners.

By 11 April food was getting low and, as we were unable to get news of the *Phoenix*, I decided to walk to the mission station. There, by the aid of the radio, I could find out if the *Phoenix* had left on time and, if not, could arrange for a further supply of food to be sent out by air. We boarded Fred Gray's launch, to cover part of the journey by sea, but a particularly heavy storm drove us into shelter and we returned to camp four hours later, with nothing accomplished. Early next morning Fred Rose, a visitor, Gordon Sweeney, a patrol officer of the Native Affairs Branch, and I, with a number of aboriginal men, set out to walk to the mission station on the Angoroko River, thirty-eight miles distant. It had been raining for days. Five inches had fallen on the day our boat was driven into shelter and, as it turned out, three inches on the day we walked. The track was an old Army road, which for most of the way had been turned into a water-course by continuous rains, the streams were filled to overflowing, and the swamps, sometimes waist-deep, extended for miles.

When at 10.30 p.m. we completed that strenuous journey, we found, to our chagrin, that the Angoroko River was too heavily flooded for us, in our exhausted condition, to cross. So after all the strenuous effort we had to spend the night, sleeping in the mud around tiny smouldering fires, on the *wrong* side of the river. Even when, next morning, we did succeed in reaching the opposite bank, the heavy static prevented wireless communication until the evening. When I learned that heavy weather had kept the *Phoenix* at Darwin I contacted the Army and Air Force, who quickly co-operated, and before I was able to return to Umbakumba a Catalina flying-boat had delivered food to the expedition camp, and, for the time being, our troubles were over.

3: Mountford E-5 (1948) 1956 OII7 Murngin OII7

But not for long. On 5 May Bassett-Smith, who had by then succeeded in getting his wireless set to work as a receiver, intercepted a message from Johnson, saying that the barge *Phoenix* was on a reef in Boucaut Bay,[5] but that the staff and supplies were safe. Knowing that a spell of rough weather would break up the ancient barge I arranged with Fred Gray to take us to the wreck, about three hundred miles distant, in his little 33-foot launch, and, if necessary, bring back the members of our party with what scientific equipment we could salvage. 122

For five days our little craft battled against heavy seas to reach the barge. When we arrived at Milingimbi, in the Crocodile Islands, we saw, to our great relief, the *Phoenix* unloading cargo with her flat bottom resting on the mud.[6] She had floated off the reef on the high tide of the previous day. Finding our supplies were safe and the staff well, we loaded up some of the scientific instruments and equipment (we were not short of food in the main camp) and, taking Deignan with us, set out for Umbakumba. It took six days to return to Groote Eylandt, the weather conditions being even worse than on the outward journey, and on 21 May, six days after our arrival and five weeks after her scheduled time, the *Phoenix* entered Little Lagoon with the supplies for which we had waited so long.

With all the party together and ample supplies, work started in earnest. Billington and Hodges, having finished their medical examination of the aborigines at Umbakumba, moved to the mission station on the Angoroko River; Miss McArthur, who had already completed one nutritional camp at Hemple Bay, established another at Bickerton Island, accompanied by Specht, the botanist, and Howard Coates, an officer of the Native Affairs Branch; while Setzler and McCarthy spent a few days at Winchelsea Island, excavating Malay graves. Later, McCarthy examined cave paintings within the area. In general, the naturalists did most of their collecting around the main camp.

My duties as leader kept me, for most of the time, in the main camp. I was able, however, to make a brief stay at Bickerton Island, visit totemic places along the west coast of Groote Eylandt and, with McCarthy and others, examine the cave paintings at Chasm Island which had been discovered by Flinders in 1803. I was also able to view a totemic ceremony of which, previously, we had little knowledge.

The late arrival of the *Phoenix* necessitated the abandonment of the Roper River camp. But the added length of stay at Groote Eylandt was advantageous, because it allowed members of the party to increase their knowledge and natural history collections of this interesting island environment.

After fourteen weeks at Groote Eylandt a Catalina flying-boat and a mission launch moved the party to Yirrkalla. This was by far the most pleasant of all our camps. We pitched our tents on the crown of a sandhill carpeted with a mat of thick grass, a welcome change after the soft sand of Umbakumba. Before us was an open curving beach, on which the waves thundered day and night, and [133]

5. Pl. 24. 6. Pl. 26.

3: Mountford E-5 (1948) 1956 Ol17 Margin Ol17

behind us a fresh-water swamp, shaded by large trees, fringed with luxuriant grasses and intersected with a stream of clear water. The weather, too, was at its best. The mists of morning gave way to warm dry days, while the nights were chilly and refreshing. As we sat at meals we could look across the tumbling waters and watch the aboriginal children at play, shooting the breakers in their small canoes, spearing fish, or drawing pictures in the glistening sands.

The day after reaching Yirrkalla, we received a pleasant surprise in the form of a visit from the American Consul for South Australia, Mr E. Seibert, who had made the journey to see his American colleagues; the Administrator for the Northern Territory, Mr A. R. Driver; and the Director-General of Information, Mr Kevin Murphy.

The only change of staff happened at Yirrkalla. Gordon, the transport officer, returned to Adelaide because of sickness in his family. Bray became transport officer and the position as cook was filled by Reginald Hollow.

We had no sooner settled in our camp than the Northern Territory patrol launch *Kuru* visited us. With it came W. E. Harney to act as guide to the expedition. Harney's knowledge of Arnhem Land, especially of the Gulf of Carpentaria, is extensive; of the aboriginal people, deep and understanding; and of the fauna and flora, considerable. As a story-teller and singer, Harney entertained us, individually and collectively, for hours with his tales of cattle thieves, droving and journeys with the aborigines. Merely stopping to pick up Miss McArthur, Miller, Setzler, McCarthy and Harney, the *Kuru* continued her journey to Port Bradshaw, where Setzler dug out more Malay graves, Miller caught fish by line, poison and net, and McCarthy and Harney examined a small group of cave paintings at Jelanghara. Miss McArthur had asked to be allowed to establish a nutrition camp, with no other companions but her two aboriginal interpreters, a man and his wife, claiming that she could get a truer picture of the aborigines in their natural environment if she were by herself.

On the return of the party from Port Bradshaw, Setzler and McCarthy flew to Milingimbi to carry out archaeological research, whilst the remainder of the scientists concentrated on their own special interests near the base camp. During this time, the botanist, mammalogist, ornithologist, and particularly the ichthyologist added greatly to their collections. Billington and Hodges set up their nutrition laboratory in the mission hospital, a much more comfortable place for work than Umbakumba. Bassett-Smith and I photographed many aspects of aboriginal life on colour cine film. The aboriginal men also produced for me many unusual bark paintings as well as carved and painted figures.

But again sea transport troubles arose. During the period of the Yirrkalla camp I had flown into Darwin and arranged with some Chinese merchants to send their forty-ton landing barge *Triumph* to Yirrkalla, load all the gear and, with members of the party aboard, take the barge around the north coast and up the East Alligator River to our next camp at Oenpelli, a journey of about six hundred miles. Although the journey would not have been comfortable, this

122 move would have been much simpler than by any other means. But a few days before the barge was due to set out from Darwin its engines failed, leaving us to reach Oenpelli as best we could. Again the Air Force came to our rescue and, on 9 September, moved most of our supplies and party to Darwin, about two months after we had landed at Yirrkalla.

Two of the party, Johnson and Bassett-Smith, travelled with the remainder of our supplies in the mission lugger *Victory*. Johnson disembarked at Cape Don to collect mammals, Bassett-Smith continuing the journey to Oenpelli. By 20 September the remainder of the party had reached Oenpelli and were ready to start work.

In selecting Oenpelli I had estimated that it would be the most spectacular, the most productive and, at the same time, the most uncomfortable of our research camps; all these expectations were fulfilled.

Looking from our tent doors, we could see a placid lagoon, dotted with water-lilies and numberless birds and fringed with green rushes; on the distant shore was the eucalyptus forest; beyond that the brown buffalo-grass flood plain, and behind that, again, the high escarpment of the rugged Arnhem Land plateau, blue with the haze of distance.

Oenpelli offered a varied field for all: the naturalists, the anthropologists and the photographers.[7] It has three distinct physical environments, each rich in its own flora and fauna; the open savannah woodlands, the black soil flood plains of the Alligator Rivers, and the forbidding plateau country in the caves of which we were to find relics of early man and innumerable aboriginal paintings.

But in physical comfort Oenpelli had little to recommend it. Although the early mornings and late evenings were sometimes pleasant, the hours of daylight were the reverse. The widespreading plains and rocky hillsides reflected the burning heat of the sun, and the hot winds and smoke from the grass-fires lit by the aborigines[8] added to the discomfort. Every day, the temperature within the tents rose to over 100° F., and on several occasions reached 108° F. Nor were the nights much better, for when writing up our notes or preparing the specimens gathered during the day, the mosquitoes attacked us and myriads of moths, beetles and other flying things crawled into our eyes and became entangled in our hair and clothing.

Although everyone found the conditions somewhat trying, I think that Billington and Hodges worked under the greatest disadvantages. Their laboratory consisted of two Army tents, set end to end in a dusty paddock. The high temperature and the dust, where cleanliness is so important, were a continuous trial. Yet these two kept going without complaints and finished their allotted task.

Setzler and McCarthy carried out a series of archaeological excavations in the cave floors at U'nbalanja Hill,[9] about a mile west of the main camp, and working

7. Pl. 1A.
8. At the end of the dry season, the aborigines burn the grass so that they can travel more easily.
9. Pl. 1B.

3: Mountford E-5 (1948) 1956 O117 Murngin O117

conditions there were also unpleasant. The temperature among the rocks was high, the humidity oppressive and the dust from the sieves so dense that it was sometimes difficult to see the archaeologists. 122

After a while McCarthy left and went to Fish Creek with Bray and Miss McArthur, leaving Setzler to carry on with only the help of two aborigines. At Fish Creek Miss McArthur studied the diet and food habits of an aboriginal group, and McCarthy noted their methods of food-gathering; Bray added many insects to his entomological collection.

The reduced size of the lagoons at the end of the dry season had concentrated the fish. Miller declared that they were the richest waters in which he had collected. He netted his specimens in both the fresh-water lagoon and the tidal East Alligator River.

For the ornithologist there were birds everywhere, on the water, in the grass, among the trees and the tumbled rocks of the plateau. Oenpelli was a prolific field for Deignan. For the botanist, too, the conditions were equally good and Specht's collection grew by leaps and bounds. Basser-Smith and I concentrated on making a coloured film on the varied bird and plant life of the lagoons. And in the caves of the rugged plateau I found extensive galleries of unusual cave paintings.

On 19 October, just as the party was farewelling Miller on the eve of his departure for U.S.A., Johnson reached Oenpelli after walking 160 miles from Cape Don, without a native to guide him. He had been successful in making a collection of mammals which can be compared with that made by the naturalist Gilbert over a hundred years ago.

But, even to the end, transport troubles followed us. The Chinese merchants, having repaired the landing barge *Triumph*, had arranged to send it up the East Alligator River to Oenpelli, load our supplies and, with the party aboard, transport us to Darwin. We had partly dismantled our camp, when the news came through by wireless that a widespread measles epidemic had broken out in the Darwin area and the movement of all aborigines was prohibited. As the barge was manned largely by an aboriginal crew, that meant the *Triumph* could not leave Darwin. It seemed as if we might have to wait, in a partly dismantled camp, for an indefinite time, but after many negotiations I was able to arrange for Harney and myself to be flown into Darwin to form part of the crew. The final difficulty was overcome when Harry Moss, the pilot of the little plane that carried us to Darwin, generously offered to act as our pilot along the treacherous East Alligator River.

We left Darwin at midnight, and two days later, on 1 November, reached the Oenpelli landing. Most of that night, and all the next day, we worked incessantly transferring the supplies by motor from our camp, several miles inland, to the river bank. Then, as the brief tide (we were seventy miles from the sea) lifted the barge from the muddy bottom, everyone, expedition members and aborigines alike, rushed the goods on board hoping to get away before the tide went out.

3: Mountford E-5 (1948) 1956 OI17 Murngin OI17

But a tangled anchor rope delayed us and we were left stranded in the mud for another twelve hours. By next sunrise, however, we were on our way down the river and by sunset, two days later, we were berthed at the Darwin jetty. The field work of the expedition was over.

The results of the expedition could hardly have been richer, both from the standpoint of human companionship and scientific results. I cannot speak too highly of the good fellowship that existed between members of the party during the eight months we were together, a good fellowship not always present on expeditions where members have been together for extended periods. The gross results of the collections, too, were impressive: 13,500 plant specimens, 30,000 fish, 850 birds, 460 animals, several thousand aboriginal implements and weapons, together with photographs and drawings of a large number of cave paintings from Chasm Island, Groote Eylandt and Oenpelli. There was also a collection of several hundred aboriginal bark paintings and two hundred string figures. In addition to the physical collections of natural history and ethnological specimens, each scientist had written extensive field notes as a basis for his scientific papers. There were also many hundreds of monochrome and coloured photographs as well as several miles of colour film on aboriginal life and natural history.

Two articles on the expedition have been published in the *National Geographic Magazine*: 'Cruise to Stone Age Arnhem Land'[10] by Howell Walker and 'Exploring Stone Age Arnhem Land'[11] by myself. Four coloured cine films have also been completed, with Bassett-Smith as photographer and myself as director: 'Arnhem Land', a survey of the natural history and ethnology of that region; 'Aborigines of the Sea Coast', dealing with native life at Yirrkalla; 'Birds and Billabongs', picturing the birds and the water-lilies of Oenpelli lagoons; and 'The Arawaltja Ceremony' of Groote Eylandt.

This volume is the first of a series which will describe the scientific results of the Arnhem Land Expedition. General subjects which will be published in the succeeding volumes are: Ethnology, archaeology, ornithology, mammalogy, herpetology, conchology, botany, ichthyology.

The ethnological and natural history specimens collected on the expedition will, when the research work on them is completed, be distributed between the Australian and American institutions, with the exception of the botanical collection. A duplicated collection has already been presented to the major herbaria in Australia; to the Kew Gardens, London; to the Arnold Herbarium, Harvard University, Boston; to the United States National Herbarium, Washington; and to the Rijksherbarium, Leiden, Netherlands.

Many of the cave paintings discovered at Oenpelli, and bark paintings collected at Groote Eylandt, Yirrkalla and Oenpelli, have been reproduced in colour by UNESCO in *Australia: Aboriginal Paintings–Arnhem Land*.

C.P.M.

10. Walker (1949), pp. 417-30. 11. Mountford (1949), pp. 745-82.

6: Berndt E-5 (1946-1947) 1951
OI17 Murngin OI17

which then has to be quickened. The coastal Arnhem Landers have had centuries of contact, and it may be that the usually accepted Aboriginal doctrine of conception has been modified here. In any case, granting the premises, the form in which they hold it is eminently logical. 114 842 796

Amongst the many other interesting points raised by the author is the vital significance of dreams, particularly for ritual and its interpretation. One of Mr. Berndt's important contributions to the anthropology of northern Arnhem Land is his systematic recording of dreams—a sign of the confidence put in him by the natives, and also a sign of the objectivity with which they regard dreams. 114 123 787

One last point: Mr. Berndt lays stress on the importance of the ritual rôle played by women in this region. He is correct in doing so. Though they are not on the "Mother Place", yet they are nearby playing their part, a part which stems from the Dreamtime, when the sacred ritual was theirs; and how else could it be, for life and birth is through the womb? A cult of the Great Mother would have no foundation apart from the women through whom her children must be born. Women here have their sacred aspect and sacred rôle. 114 562 796

The Author and the Field

Mr. R. M. Berndt was well equipped for doing research into the religion of Arnhem Land. After study in the Department of Anthropology, University of Sydney, he with his wife (Catherine H. Berndt), also an Anthropologist, did four years of field research amongst Aborigines in both tribal and detribalized conditions. This included about eighteen months on the south-west of Arnhem Land and on the border of the Kimberley Division of Western Australia, where he was introduced to the cult. In 1946 when the Australian National Research Council was able to make a further grant to these workers, we selected the north-eastern corner of Arnhem Land as the main field. Research there would be complementary to what Dr. Warner had done eighteen years before; in addition it was an area subject to the spread of native customs and rites from both the west and the south, and was also likely to show some cultural effects arising from long contact with Macassans or others who visited the region to engage in marine industry. Finally, although a Mission had been operating at Yirrkalla for nearly ten years and an Air Force base had been established there during the war, causing some modification of native life, in particular, lessening the degree of nomadism, yet in spite of this, the fundamental drives and beliefs had not been affected. Men in the prime of life as well as the old men still belonged to the "old order". It was, therefore, still possible to study the native religion in its cultural and social setting as a functioning institution. Fortunately, I was able to assure myself of this during a visit and inquiries in the region in 1946. 114 121 [122] [797] [177]

6: Berndt E-5 (1946-1947) 1951
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114 Anthropological field-work was carried out by the writer and his wife in the Northern Territory between the years 1944–47, and in north-eastern Arnhem Land in 1946–47. The Ma:ra and Alawa material was obtained from informants on the Northern Territory Army Settlements in 1945, at Larramah, Mataranka, Manbulloo (Katherine), Adelaide River and Darwin; work in west-central Northern Territory and the Daly River region (mention of which is made incidentally in this volume) took place between 1944–46. In the north-eastern Arnhem Land region, in particular, our work was carried out primarily through the medium of the local dialects.

122 For the greater part of this field-work we were under the aegis of the Australian National Research Council, and the Department of Anthropology, University of Sydney, while the writing up of this work was made possible by a Research Grant from the Research Committee of the University of Sydney.

000 As this is not a comparative study of Aboriginal religion throughout Australia, no attempt is made to evaluate the material of previous field-workers who have written on this subject, and the reader will find little reference to their work in the following pages. Nevertheless, the works of O. Siebert, C. Strehlow, A. W. Howitt, B. Spencer and F. J. Gillen, A. P. Elkin, L. Warner, P. Kaberry, G. Róheim, M. F. Ashley Montagu, T. G. H. Strehlow and others should be consulted, should the reader be interested in the subject.[4]

The writer wishes to acknowledge the continued help, encouragement and advice of Professor A. P. Elkin, of the Department of Anthropology, University of Sydney, and the assistance of his wife, Catherine H. Berndt, in preparing the manuscript for publication. His greatest debt however rests with the native informants who supplied the data from which this volume was compiled. The only

4. A. W. Howitt, *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia*, London, 1904; C. Strehlow, *Die Aranda- und Loritja Stämme in Zentral Australien. Mythen, Sagen, und Märchen des Aranda-Stammes in Zentral Australien*, Gesammelt, von Carl Strehlow, Bearbeitet, Von Moritz von Leonhardi; Frankfurt, 1907–1921; E. Eylmann, *Die Eingeborenen der Kolonie Südaustralien*, Berlin, 1908; O. Siebert, *Sagen und Sitten der Dieri und Nachbarstamme in Central Australien*, *Globus*, Vol. 97, 1910; B. Spencer, *Native Tribes of the Northern Territory of Australia*, London, 1914; H. Basedow, *The Australian Aboriginal*, Adelaide, Chapter XXVII; G. Roheim, *op. cit.* 1925 and 1930, "Women and Their Life in Central Australia", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 63, 1933, pp. 207–265, *The Eternal Ones of the Dream*, New York, 1945; L. Warner, *A Black Civilization*, New York and London, 1937; M. F. Ashley Montagu, *Coming into Being among the Australian Aborigines*, London, 1937; B. Spencer and F. J. Gillen, *The Native Tribes of Central Australia*, London, 1938; A. P. Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines*, Sydney, 1938, and "Studies in Australian Totemism", *Oceania Monograph No. 2*, Sydney; P. Kaberry, *Aboriginal Woman, Sacred and Profane*, London, 1939; T. G. H. Strehlow, *Aranda Traditions*, Melbourne, 1947; E. A. Worms, Religiose Vorstellungen und Kultur einiger nordwestaustralischer Stamme in funfzig Legenden, *Annali Lateranensi*, IV, 1940, S. 268. *Vide* also articles in the journal *Oceania*, issued by the Australian National Research Council of Sydney.

6: Berndt E-5 (1946-1947) 1951
OI17 Murngin OI17

CHAPTER I

THE CULTURAL PATTERN OF NORTH-EASTERN ARNHEM LAND SOCIETY

a. The Geographical Background:

The main centre with which we shall be dealing here is Yirrkalla, in the far north-eastern corner of the Arnhem Land Aboriginal Reserve. The surrounding area is thickly wooded, with jungles and mangrove swamps, fresh water streams and tidal rivers, long beaches broken by sheer cliffs, and occasional islands fairly close to the shore.

Yirrkalla itself takes its name from a fresh water creek that flows into the surf beside a long white curving beach. This creek drains a wide area of lagoon and swamp, its source far back in the hilly inland. Wide grass flats, easily inundated during the monsoonal rains, and dense jungles, lie in the back country not too far from the coast line. At Yirrkalla the Methodist Overseas Mission established a station some eleven years ago: and now a Mission house on a low cliff dominates the beach, where native huts, mostly of cast-off European timber and tin, are arranged in rows. Beyond the Mission house, on a smaller beach, are other huts; and a church, store-house, dispensary and garden complete the settlement.

This Mission station is the centre for natives whose traditional home camps are at Blue Mud Bay, Trial and Caledon Bays and Port Bradshaw to the south, facing the Gulf of Carpentaria, while visitors come from Groote Eylandt, Woodah Island and Rose River. The Yirrkalla local groups belong mainly to Cape Arnhem, Bremer Island, Melville Bay, and the English Company Islands, as well as to Arnhem Bay: but natives from the Wessel and Elcho Islands, Milingimbi in the Crocodile Islands, and from the mainland to the west, do visit this region. Yirrkalla is thus a strategic base for anthropologists and missionaries who desire to contact members of various groups of a more or less similar cultural and linguistic background.

Geographically speaking, the Yirrkalla groups are comparatively isolated, for to-day only the Mission lugger calls at this depôt, with occasional visits by other Europeans who come by boat and 'plane. Yirrkalla is approximately 500 sea-miles east of Darwin, 130 miles

7: Berndt E-5 (1946-1950) 1952
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language. Their society is constructed on the moiety principle, and descent is in all cases primarily patrilineal. There is no clearly defined tribe, but a series of linguistic groups associated with clans; all of these may be called, collectively, the Wulamba bloc of the Miwaitj language group (referring to the sum total of the different dialects). Yirrkalla is situated on the extreme north-east corner of Arnhem Land between Melville Bay and Cape Arnhem, and Aborigines gather there from places as far distant as Blue Mud and Caledon and Trial Bays, Rose River, and Woodah and Groote Islands in the south and south-east, and Arnhem and Buckingham Bays, Elcho, English Company and Wessel Islands in the north-west. Milingimbi is in the Crocodile Island group on the central-north coast; it is also a meeting place for members of many groups, particularly those from the mainland around the Blyth, Goyder and Woolen Rivers.

Virtually all the writer's field work has been carried out through the medium of the native language, both at Yirrkalla and Milingimbi. Knowledge of local dialects is essential in social anthropological work, and particularly in a study of Aboriginal religion. Field work at Yirrkalla was carried out in 1946–7 and at Milingimbi in 1950 (a total period of thirteen months actually working on the field in this particular region); the first period was made possible by grants from the Australian National Research Council, and was under the auspices of the Department of Anthropology, University of Sydney, while the latter period was financed by grants from the Research Committee of the University of Sydney and the Department of Anthropology of the same University. Writing up of this material was also made possible by grants from the Research Committee.

So many informants have helped in the process of collecting the data presented here that a list of their names would be tiresome and meaningless to the reader. Not only main *dua* moiety headmen, but also those of the *jiritja* moiety, contributed; and these were members of many linguistic groups. In addition, attitudes of local Aboriginal women towards this religious cult were discussed with them by my wife (Catherine Berndt), and this aided directly the analysis of certain sections. This study of the Djanggawul, then, does not express solely the information and attitudes of male natives, but takes into account both male and female elements in the culture. The practice in recording the interlinear phonetic renderings of the songs was for informants belonging to a particular area through which the Djanggawul passed to put forward those songs themselves, for it was their country and they were expected to have more complete knowledge of the songs. In this way, each

8: Berndt E-5 (1946-1950) 1954
OI17 Murngin OI17

here the main purpose has been to create a basis for our study. Many other aspects, too, need more detailed treatment – for example, the period of pre-Macassan to Macassan contact (see Chapters 5 to 10), Europeans on the north coast (Chapter 11), and conditions during the present day (Chapters 17 to 18). Nor have we attempted to discuss native policy in general, in relation to Arnhem Land and its people. This is a book about the Arnhem Land coast, its natives, and its contact through the centuries with peoples of differing cultures. We see the Arnhem Landers' adjustment to the first waves of Indonesian association, and their consequent "unsettlement" when this form of contact was upset by the infiltration of other groups: conditions altered rapidly, and the Aborigines found themselves unable to grapple successfully with their changing circumstances.

Within this picture are a multitude of experiences expressed in a variety of ways – the Aborigines' association with Indonesian traders, their journeys to the East India Archipelago, their intercourse with Torres Strait Islanders, Japanese, and Europeans, and their constant endeavour to maintain their cultural independence and to defend their territory against the inroads of these visitors. It was this which led to the spearings and "massacres" described in the main body of this book, activities which today we would term a form of guerilla warfare. The whole history of a people's contact with the outside world over many centuries is condensed into a few Chapters of this book: and though some of their experiences may seem to us bizarre and exotic, to the Aborigines of Arnhem Land they were, even if at times unexpected, part of the tapestry of everyday life.

Much of the material in this book was obtained during our anthropological research work in western, north-eastern and eastern Arnhem Land between the years 1946-47 and 1949-50. This followed previous research in other parts of the Northern Territory in 1944-46, which in turn was a continuation of a study made in north-western, middle-north and southern South Australia in 1939-44. The greater part of this work was carried out under the auspices of the Australian National Research Council in conjunction with the Department of Anthropology, Sydney

8: Berndt E-5 (1946-1950) 1954
OI17 Murngin OI17

FOREWORD

University. Between the years 1944-46, however, we were engaged as anthropologists to study native welfare on certain Northern Territory pastoral stations and Army native settlements. The writing and preparation of this book, like our most recent Arnhem Land trip, was made possible by research grants from the Research Committee of the University of Sydney. 122

We wish to acknowledge the continued help and advice of Professor A. P. Elkin of the Department of Anthropology, Sydney University, to whom this book is dedicated, as well as the courtesy and helpfulness of the Northern Territory Department of Native Affairs, the officials of the South Australian Archives Department of the Public Library, and the staffs of the Methodist and Church Missionary Society stations in Arnhem Land. Our deep sense of gratitude to the Arnhem Landers themselves, particularly those at Yirrkalla, Goulburn Islands and Oenpelli, cannot be expressed in mere words. Perhaps one day, when competent schools have been established in Arnhem Land, the literate among these people will read with interest this history of their people's contact with alien groups. In this way they will receive some compensation and, in some slight degree, our debt to them will be honoured. 800

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9: Thomson E-5 (1935-1943)1949
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ECONOMIC STRUCTURE AND THE CEREMONIAL EXCHANGE CYCLE IN ARNHEM LAND*

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* The expeditions in Arnhem Land, Northern Territory of Australia, on which this work was carried out, were undertaken in 1935-6-7, under commission by the Commonwealth Government, and in 1941-2-3, while on war service, in command of the Special Reconnaissance Unit, and the Northern Territory Coastal Patrol. During this period the writer lived for more than four years with the people of Arnhem Land.

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15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
OI17 Murngin OI17

by sending a missionary and his wife, who in 1934 selected Yirrkala, near Cape Arnhem, as a suitable centre from which understanding and friendship could radiate out into those parts of the region not influenced by Milingimbi, 150 miles to the west, and the Groote Eylandt Mission, 140 miles to the south.

This missionary was Wilbur Chaseling, the author of this book, readers of which will realize that an excellent choice was made. Mr and Mrs Chaseling did not have time to take the course in Anthropology in the University of Sydney, for the need to go north was urgent; they could only attend a few times and discuss their work with myself. This book, however, and later talks which I have had with Mr Chaseling show two things: first, that he had the facility to get to know and understand his native people, their culture and manner of life, and second, that he used and applied this knowledge in working out his missionary objectives and methods. Thus, one objective which he set himself was 'to preserve native culture, to encourage the revival of old ceremonies and to preserve in the natives an appreciation of their own social organization'. At the same time, he realized that some customs (such as infanticide and 'warfare') had to be discouraged, while, along with agriculture and medicine, the Christian faith had to be presented in a way that could be understood, and understood, not as a contradiction of, and judgement on, the past, but as its fulfilment.

Mr Chaseling's book is a readable and simple introduction to the life and faith of a primitive food-gathering people. It provides a real insight into their minds and everyday happenings. An anthropologist might examine and discuss more theoretically (and boringly) various aspects of the social organization or ritual life, but limited as he is to a couple of visits totalling about twenty-one months, he could not provide that wealth of illustrations and incidents which the observant missionary who spends several years in the

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
O117 Murngin O117

Age men. Very little was known of Arnhem Land and there was a great deal of guessing. Charts were coastline sketches plotted by Matthew Flinders in the stormy season in 1803, when to overcome the tossing of his small boat, he ordered his sailors to lash him high on the mast with his box of instruments by his side. In the medley of suggestions made for the subjugation of east Arnhem Land the Commonwealth Government accepted the offer of the Methodist Missionary Society to establish a mission station in the area, and it was my good fortune to be accepted to commence the new work.

I had a personal interest in these people, for nomads and their ways had teased my fancy from infancy. Both my mother's and father's families were among the pioneers in the Hawkesbury Valley in New South Wales, where they erected their slab huts and grew their maize. Life was hard for the pioneer, but it was also interesting, with its floods, fires, isolation, and Stone Age men. One died from spear wounds, several had hairbreadth escapes, and stories of their adventures retold among the scenes of the events made a happy background for a growing boy. In one region, a crumbling stone fire-place was all that remained of a stone-and-slab homestead where a fatal attack had been made: on another hillside a partly buried hearthstone showed where a settler's wife had defended herself from an enraged warrior with boiling water from her cooking-pots. As a child, my happiest adventures were in caves blackened by ancient camp-fires and bearing the imprint of aboriginal hands, or amongst rounded sandstone pillars in a totem-centre, or beside flat rocks and caves scored by Stone Age artists.

In May 1934 my wife and I landed in Darwin. Five hundred miles of trackless bush and the Arafura Sea lay between us and the Gulf of Carpentaria, and the only means of transport was a lugger. A lugger sounded very glamorous;

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
O117 Murngin O117

but the *Marree*, being made ready for her three-monthly trip to mission stations in Arnhem Land, lay on a Darwin mud-flat waiting to be scraped and caulked.

A week later it seemed safe to take the boat to sea, and early in the morning we boarded the *Marree* as the jovial Baduan captain was urging his Yulengor crew to row the last of the mail and stores from the beach. Flour, rice, sugar, groceries, trade-goods, petrol, galvanized iron, cement, agricultural tools, a stove, and a medley of small items overflowed to the decks, where young fruit-trees, crates of fowls, ducks, and geese added to the confusion. There were drums of drinking-water, a heap of firewood for use on the trip, and a billy goat for the herds on isolated settlements.

A Yulengor crew dragged the anchor from the harbour mud, and we were away. By late afternoon the mainland had dropped from sight and we edged our way past the shores of Melville Island. As the sun sank below the island, we boiled our billy in an open drum on deck and prepared for the night. Stars sparkled in a cloudless sky, phosphorescent waves fanned behind us as we rode the gentle swell of Van Diemen's Gulf, and life aboard a lugger seemed good—but not for long. The cockroaches saw to that; they chirped and scuttled through the cabin, chewed labels off tinned foods, ate holes in the bread and nibbled our toe-nails. Later we were told that seasoned lugger travellers slept in their boots. But with the dawn came a shout from the Yulengor crew, as they sighted beams from the Cape Don Lighthouse, and by sunrise we were wallowing in the notorious tide-rip at the Cape and feeling our way through scattered rocks to an anchorage by the jetty.

Cape Don Lighthouse overlooks many square miles of mud-flats and mangrove swamps, a wide expanse of mud and jungle sheltering a teeming life of trepang, crabs, crocodiles, flying-foxes, mud-hopping fish, and mosquitoes. Apart from the monthly visit of the supply-boat, the only

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
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CHAPTER SEVEN

Languages, Signs, and Smoke-Signals

197 POPULAR opinion has it that all aborigines speak one language, and I have often been asked if I can 'speak aboriginal'. Actually, there are scores of different tribal languages throughout Australia, and within these there are hundreds of horde-dialects. In the 34,000 square miles of Arnhem Land there are five distinct languages, one for each of the [621] five groups of hordes, and as there are between a dozen and forty hordes in each horde-group, there are well over a hundred dialects in this small part of Australia.

[114] [621] In the group that I knew best, which extended from Cape Stewart to Blue Mud Bay, there were thirty-five hordes, each speaking its own dialect. If you had mastered one of them, Yulengor a few miles away probably could not have understood you. I found that when members of these 191 widely separated hordes met, they could not make themselves 197 understood in their own dialects, but experimented on several till they found one familiar to both parties.

Stone Age men are born linguists, and not only is their speech grammatically correct, but youths amuse themselves by conversing in some little-known dialect. Old Wonggu [527] occasionally introduced a Macassar sentence into ordinary conversation so as to puzzle me, and he would enjoy his joke in using this dialect learnt fifty years previously from East Indian traders. English words and phrases, as well as pidgin English, have occasionally been picked up from traders and beachcombers.

127 191 Since it should be easier for one white man to learn an

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
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aboriginal dialect than for several hundred nomads to learn English, I arranged with two youths to teach me. But until I constantly practised the local dialect on them I found that they were learning English much faster than I was learning their tongue. In their anxiety to learn English, they said that it would be quicker for me to teach them than for me to bother to learn aboriginal; moreover, I would eventually go back to my own people, and they would then have to start all over again and teach my successor.

If good English is spoken to the aboriginal he learns it with an ability and speed that makes the use of pidgin English absurd. No one knows where pidgin English originated, but the term 'pidgin' is thought to be a Chinese corruption of the word 'business'. Through the years there has been a local fungus-development of an Australian pidgin-jargon, in which occur such travesties of speech as 'blackfellow', 'gin', 'lubra', 'thinkin', 'savvy', 'sitdown', 'alonga', and 'gammon'; and these in turn have been reinforced by still more hybrid phrases and transplanted by traders throughout the South Pacific.

At Goulburn Island where a school had been established for twenty years, a Government doctor was making an inspection and singled out an old woman for further attention. Turning to her son, the doctor loosed a flood of pidgin which I failed to follow, but I gathered that he wanted to know how long her fingers had been doubled up. The heavy silence was broken by the boy saying, in perfectly modulated English: 'I beg your pardon, doctor?' Fortunately the medico had a sense of humour and his laughter cleared the way for a successful inquiry in English. Recently a naval patrol vessel anchored off Goulburn Island, and an officer questioned a youth in pidgin. The boy said in surprise: 'Excuse me, sir, are you a "new Australian"?'

In writing the dialect, I found that several English consonants were not needed and the ordinary alphabet had to be